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The Secret Goldfish

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The Secret Goldfish

by Russell Berndt
Forestry, Sophomore

THE toilet in our 'partment hasn't been work'n too good lately, but that's not really too different 'cause lotsa things in our house don't work too good. Right now my dad is yell'n at Mr. Mitchell on the telephone about the toilet. I don't think it'll do any good, though, 'cause even I know that it's plumbers, not lan'lords that fixes toilets. Mr. Mitchell is a lan'lord, and I think he's got somth'n to do with the church or someth'n. Anyway, like I said, the toilet hasn't been work'n right. One time when I flushed it the water just kept com'n outta that little hole at the bottom. It was like when my dad pours some beer in a glass, and the foam just keeps gett'n higher and higher till it runs over the edge and turns back into beer on the arm of the sofa. My mom is always yell'n at my dad when he does that, and I sure caught heck from her when she came in the bathroom and saw that toilet water runn'n all over the floor. Another time when I flushed it some stuff that looked like my mom's beef stew came outta the little hole. Anyway, the reason I'm tell'n you about the toilet is 'cause it's kinda the toilet's fault that I can't come outta my room for the whole weekend.

Tony Martelli lives over in the 'partment across the street, and he was just here want'n to know if I could come over and see his new baby brother, but my dad told him I couldn't. I don't really care though, 'cause I didn't want to see his dumb old baby brother anyway. Tony Martelli has got about a million brothers an' sisters that his mom and dad has got him, but I never seem to get any. So one day I asked my mom why the Martellis' got all them kids, and she says it was so as they could outnumber the roaches in their 'partment house.

I didn't really think too much about roaches till one day when I was visit'n Mrs. Vincent. Mrs. Vincent is kinda old, and she lives in a wheelchair down on the first floor.

Anyway, she was tell'n me about Mr. Vincent and how he'd been in a navy and got killed in some war. And she was tell'n me how she wished that she lived by the sea so as she could be closer to Mr. Vincent. I'd never seen a sea before, but from what Mrs. Vincent told me it sounded a lot like Lake Michigan, only with great big waves. She said it was a place where all the water from all the rivers and lakes goes and disappears into the sky, and she said that was where Mr. Vincent was buried. I figured that Mr. Vincent must have gone to heaven, it being in the sky and the sky being next to the sea. Anyway, old Mrs. Vincent started to cry like she does sometimes, so I tried to think up someth'n to say to sort of change what she was think'n about, but all I could think of was roaches. So I asked Mrs. Vincent if she's got any roaches in her house, and her eyes got real big like they was star'n at someth'n real far away, and she says how she can't stand the little monster's, but she says she can't afford a 'sterminator to take them away. So I told her that I'd get rid of them for her. She said she'd give me a penny for wvery one I killed, but I didn't tell her that you can't kill roaches. You can step on a roach and think he's dead 'cause he's lay'n on his back and ther's bug juice com'n outta him, but soon as he knows you're not look'n he'll get up and crawl away. You just can't kill a roach, but I didn't tell Mrs. Vincent that. I just got me an old matchbox, and started crawl'n around look'n for roaches. The best place was in the kitchen; I caught six in there, but a few got away. By suppertime I'd caught ten roaches all together. Mrs. Vincent didn't even want to see them. She just took a dime outta her little black coin purse and gave it to me along with a funny cold kiss on my cheek.

It was the first time I'd ever had any money of my own, but I didn't want to tell my mom or dad about it 'cause they didn't like for me to have money. They said I just wasted it, but I decided that it was my money and I was gonna do what I wanted with it. The only problem was that I didn't know for sure what I wanted. I guess I wanted a baby brother of my own more than anything else, but I

didn't figure I could buy one from Tony Martelli, not for a dime at least. Then I remembered how Mrs. Vincent had a pet parakeet called Admiral Byrd, and I remembered how one time she told me that Admiral Byrd was just like a friend to her. So I decided to go to the ten-cent store and buy me a friend of my own.

The ten-cent store was a long ways away and 'cross the streetlight street at the end of our block. I'd been there a couple of times with my mom, and she told me if I ever went across the streetlight street alone that I'd get blistered by my dad, and I knew she wasn't kidd'n me 'cause he'd done it before. I figures, though, that this was worth the chance, so the next day after my school was over I went to the ten-cent store. The man at the ten-cent store said I couldn't get a parakeet for ten cents, but I could get me a goldfish for a nickel, and a box of goldfish food for another nickel. I decided that would be O.K., so he ran a net through the big cloud of goldfish that was in a big glass box, and he dropped one of them he'd caught into a little plastic bag he'd put water in. Then he tied a knot in the top of the bag and told me to give my fish just a pinch of the goldfish food once a day. I gave the man my dime, and 'cause it was kinda cold I stuck Sammy, that's what I named my fish 'cause that's what I would of named a baby brother if I'd gotten one, inside my jacket along with the goldfish food, and started back home.

When I got back, Tony Martelli was playing kick-the-can out in front of my 'partment, and when he saw me he asks me what I was hold'n underneath my coat. I puffed out my cheeks and told him I was sick and ran inside. I would've showed Sammy to him, but I'd decided that since I'd bought him with my own money he was gonna be all mine. And I wasn't gonna show him to Tony, 'cause he had his own brothers and sisters. And I wasn't gonna show him to my mom or dad, 'cause they'd blister me if they found out what I'd done. And I wasn't gonna show him to Mrs. Vincent, 'cause she was old and she might forget and tell somebody about him.

I put Sammy in an old Mason jar that I used to catch lightning bugs in, and I hid him under my bed so nobody would find him. Every day after school I'd come home and watch him swim around in his jar. I'd talk to him, and he'd open and close his mouth, but I don't know if he was really talk'n or if he was just copy'n me. Then one day I got to think'n that maybe old Sammy was try'n to tell me that he was hungry. After all, he was gett'n pretty big. So I started feeding him three times a day instead of just one. He seemed pretty happy about that. He was really smart for a fish, and everytime he saw the fishfood box he'd come up to the top of his jar 'cause he knew I was gonna feed him. Boy, he was a really smart fish.

Then one day when I came home from school Sammy was dead. I knew he was dead 'cause he was float'n instead of swimm'n, and he wasn't gold anymore. It felt kinda like somebody was choke'n me; I started to cry, but it wasn't the kind of cry'n you did when you got blistered, it was more the kind Mrs. Vincent did when she got to talk'n about Mr. Vincent. I cried for a long time, and when I finally stopped I decided that I was gonna give Sammy a funeral. I'd been to a funeral once when my gran'ma died, but I was pretty little then and didn't remember too much about it. So then I remembered about Mr. Vincent being buried in the sea, and how Mrs. Vincent said that all the water from all the lakes and stuff goes to the sea, and how Sammy probably had some of his relatives in the sea. Then I figured that the little hole at the bottom of the toilet must go to somewhere like a river or maybe even Lake Michigan, and then to the sea. So I said my prayers even though it wasn't time to go to sleep. Then I sneaked Sammy into the bathroom and flushed him on his way to heaven.

Well, right after I flushed the toilet I closed the lid so as I couldn't watch. But I'd forgot about the toilet not act'n right, and when my dad came in to use the bathroom a couple of minutes later he found Sammy still float'n in the toilet, and water still com'n outta the little hole. When he

came into my room I could tell something was wrong 'cause he came over and sat down next to me on my bed. Then he starts tell'n me in a real nice voice how it's always the best to tell the truth, 'cause you get in bad trouble when you don't tell the truth. And then he asks me if I knew about the goldfish in the toilet. So I kinda said that it was mine and dad got real mad, and I knew that he'd tricked me into tell'n the truth. I didn't care, though, anymore, 'cause Sammy was dead anyway. So I told him that it was my fish, and I told him how I bought him with my own money, and how I'd gone across the streetlight street. When I was done he blistered me good and told me I couldn't leave my room for the whole weekend.

So that's why it's kinda the crummy old toilet's fault that I'm here tell'n you about Sammy, my secret goldfish, and I'd probably be feel'n pretty bad right now except that I just remembered that I didn't tell my dad about the roaches I let loose in the kitchen, and I figure I'll be gett'n a new brother any day now.